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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## INFORMATION REPORT 25X1A

COUNTRY Indochina

SUBJECT Attitude of Tribespeople Towards Indochina War/  
Economic Problems of Viet MinhPLACE ACQUIRED  
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1. The tribespeople of Indochina have little understanding of the reason for the war which is being waged in their country, and as a result they have little feeling one way or the other as to the eventual outcome. When they are in areas which are being occupied by the Viet Minh forces they cooperate with the Viet Minh, and when they are in Vietnam territory they obey the Vietnam or French forces. They are sometimes caught in a squeeze when, after being in Viet Minh territory and having cooperated with the Viet Minh for a while they are taken back by the French and Vietnam forces who chastise them for having cooperated with the Viet Minh.
2. There are many Vietnamese who do not understand the issue over which the war is being fought, and they sometimes go along with the Viet Minh forces with the idea that they are fighting primarily for freedom from the French. Many of these people have no understanding of communism whatsoever.
3. There are a number of refugees who have come over to the side of the French and Vietnamese from Viet Minh areas. They are living principally in the cities which are under French control

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- I could not estimate the number of refugees who have escaped from Viet Minh territory, but there may have been several hundred thousand of them. The only method I know of which they have used to break through the "bamboo curtain" is to run across the border. This, of course, is very dangerous, but by charging right through many of them have succeeded in getting to the other side.
4. When the refugees do escape from Viet Minh territory many of them set up small businesses such as restaurants, or they do weaving, etc. I believe that one of the main reasons for their leaving the Viet Minh territory is economic -- they find that there is not as much to eat in Viet Minh territory as there used to be, and they find it difficult to carry on their businesses under the Viet Minh because they are cut off from the main trading

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centers which are held by the French, so they come into Vietnam territory looking for areas where they can do business. I doubt whether many of them are originally motivated by ideological reasons -- I think they are more interested in where they can get the most to eat.

5. As far as I know there has been little disillusionment on the part of the refugees who have gone over to French-held territory. I believe that on the whole they find they are better off under the French, and that it is better for them to stay on the side of democracy rather than return to communism.
6. Whenever Viet Minh prisoners who have been held by the French are released, the French must be quite sure of the prisoners' loyalty or they would never let them go. Recently there were 75 tribesmen (many of them from villages around Ban Ma Thuot and Pleiku in central Vietnam) who were originally captured as members of the Viet Minh forces, but who were about to be released because the French were convinced that they were not pro-Viet Minh and that all they wanted to do was get back to their tribes and stay out of trouble. I believe that only in such cases as this, where the French are relatively sure that the prisoners have no desire to return to the Viet Minh, would they risk releasing them.

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